



V. SHANTA

India

*2005 Ramon Magsaysay Awardee
for Public Service*

**Citation for the 2005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for
Public Service**

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Cancer is on the rise in India. Especially rampant are cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, and lungs in men—all related to tobacco use—and cancers of the breast and cervix in women. Fully 20 percent of cervical cancer in the world occurs in India, where poor rural women are particularly prone. Despite this, specialized research and treatment of these cancers in India are relatively recent phenomena. Dr. V. Shanta, executive chair of Chennai's Cancer Institute (WIA), is a pioneer in both.

V. Shanta was born to an illustrious family and raised in a world of books, ideas, and high achievement. Resisting the conventional path for women, she studied medicine at Madras Medical College and came under the spell of Muthulakshmi Reddy, a social reformer and India's first woman medical graduate. In 1954, under Dr. Reddy's leadership, the Women's Indian Association Cancer Relief Fund founded the Cancer Institute (WIA) in Madras, now Chennai. Drawn to Reddy's vision, young Dr. Shanta spurned a more lucrative post to join the Institute. She has never left.

The fledgling institute had only twelve beds and two doctors—Shanta herself and Dr. S. Krishnamurthi, the founding director and Reddy's son. As the Institute's associate director, Shanta set up India's first comprehensive pediatric cancer clinic, conducted the country's first major cancer survey, and developed its first program for the early detection of cancer in rural areas. She became a passionate advocate of cancer prevention and opened a tobacco cessation clinic. And she conducted India's first successful trials of combination therapy, leading to a dramatic breakthrough in the control and cure of oral cancer.

Simultaneously, Shanta conducted groundbreaking research on oral, cervical, and breast cancer and pediatric leukemia, publishing the results in international journals and establishing the Institute as India's first Regional Cancer Research and Treatment Center in 1975. In 1984, the Institute added a postgraduate college where Shanta proceeded to train cancer specialists, more than 150 of whom now practice throughout the subcontinent.

As director from 1980, Shanta strove to make the Institute a world-class research center with institutional partners in Europe, North America, and Japan and state-of-the-art laboratory and imaging equipment. She worked tirelessly to raise donations, grants, and government subsidies and trained hundreds of village-health nurses to screen rural women for cervical abnormalities. In 2000, she opened India's first hereditary cancer clinic.

Today, the Cancer Institute (WIA) comprises a 428-bed hospital and research center plus the Dr. Muthulakshmi College of Oncologic Sciences, with advanced specialties in medical, surgical, and radiation oncology. In an era when specialized medical care in India has become highly commercialized, Dr. Shanta strives to ensure that the Institute remains true to its ethos, "Service to all." Its services are free or subsidized for some 60 percent of its 100,000 annual patients; travel allowances make regular treatments accessible to the poor. And through a volunteer program called Sanctuary, the Institute provides hope-giving emotional support and counseling to patients and their families and to cancer-afflicted children. There are thousands who might say, as leukemia victim Delli Rao, a wageworker, has said, "I owe my life to Dr. Shanta."

Seventy-eight-year-old Shanta still sees patients, still performs surgery, and is still on call twenty-four hours a day. It disturbs her that it is so hard to raise funds for the Institute when, she says, "we seem to have enough money to construct pilgrim shelters and temples in almost every street of the city." Even so, she cautions young people against cynicism. Perhaps reflecting on her own life, she tells them: "Learn to accept that you are good and that from you a lot of good can happen."

In electing V. Shanta to receive the 2005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service, the board of trustees recognizes her leadership of Chennai's Cancer Institute (WIA) as a center of excellence and compassion for the study and treatment of cancer in India.

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Personal Data

Awardee: **V. SHANTA**
Nationality: Indian
Date of Birth: 11 March 1927
Civil Status: Single

Father: P. Viswanathan (deceased)
Mother: Bala Parvathi (deceased)

Educational Background

2002 Hon. Doctor of Sciences (Honoris Causa), Tamil Nadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University, Tamil Nadu, India
1998 Hon. Doctor of Sciences (Honoris Causa), Shri Venkateswara University, Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh, India
1985 F.A.M.S.
1968 ICCRET Fellowship, United Kingdom (Study of Marrow Transplantation)
1956-1957 Training, Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto General Hospital, Canada
1955 Medical Doctor, Gynecology & Obstetrics (Doctor of Medicine), Women and Children Hospital, Madras University
1952 Diploma in Gynecology & Obstetrics, Women and Children Hospital, Madras University
1949 M.B.B.S., Madras Medical College, Madras University

Employment/Professional Background

Academic positions:

1997-Present Executive Chairman (Honorary), Cancer Institute (WIA)
1984-1997 Chairman and Professor, Division of Medical Oncology, Gynecology & Breast Oncology, Cancer Institute (WIA)
1984-1997 Dean, Cancer Institute (Dr. Muthulakshmi) College of Oncological Sciences
1980-1997 Director and Scientific Director, Cancer Institute (WIA)
1965-1991 Doctoral (Ph.D.) Guide in Clinical Oncology and Allied Sciences, University of Madras
1959-1980 Associate Director and Scientific Director, Cancer Institute (WIA)

Leadership and Membership in Committees:

2000-Present Chairman, Governing Council, Cancer Institute (WIA)
1986-2005 Member, WHO Advisory Committee on Cancer
1986 Convenor, State Advisory Board on Cancer
1997-1999 President, Asian & Pacific Federation of Organisations for Cancer Control
1994-1999 Chairman, Indo U.S.A. Collaborative Group of Lymphoid Neoplasias (Indian Chapter)
1997 Elected Honorary Member, International Association of Cancer Registries (IARC), Lyon
1994 Nominated Member, Oncology Faculty, Bangalore University
1992-1995 Nominated Member of the Syndicate, Anna University, Madras
1988-1990 President, Indian Society of Oncology
1987-1990 Member, Scientific Advisory Board and Council of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)
1981 Member, ICMR Task Force on Tumor Registries
1981-1984 Member, Government of India, Teletherapy Committee
1970-1973 Member, ICMR Committee for Coordination of Cancer Research in India

Honors/Awards Received

National Award:

1986 Padma Shri, Government of India

Awards from Scientific Bodies:

2002 Nazli-Gad-El-Mawla Award of the International Network for Cancer Treatment and Research – Outstanding Contribution to Cancer Control in a country with limited resource.

2000 Science City – “Millennium Lifetime Achievement Awards” for Women Scientists

1995 Shrien Mehtaji Oration (Indian Academy of Cytologists)

1991 Smt. Vimala Shah Award of Banaras Hindu University for outstanding work in cancer

1984 The First “Sir Dorab Tata Oration” Award: Indian Society of Oncology

1982 Ambo – Dr. Pasupati Nath Wahi Cancer Award for contribution to Cancer Control Programme in India

1973 Raja Ravi Sher Singh of Kalsia Memorial Award of the ICMR for original work on cancer

Awards from Community and Religious Organisations:

2005 Service Award for Professional Excellence, Rotary’s Centennial Year Award

2005 Rose of Ridvan (Bahai Community) Award, Outstanding Service in the Field of Health

2004 Distinguished Citizen Award by Hamsadhwani

2004 Selfless and Outstanding Contribution to Society in Combating Cancer, Rotary Club of Madras, Perungudi

2004 Melvin Jones Worth Person Award, International Association of Lions Club District 324

2003 Kamaraj Centenary Award for Contribution to Cancer

2003 Cosmo Award for Eminent and Distinguished Citizen of the Country

2003 Guild of Service (Central-Award in recognition of contribution in the field of medicine)

2002 Sadguru Gnanananda Award for dedication in care of cancer patients

2002 (Manavaseva Dharma Samvardhani-Promotion of Social Service Consciousness)

2002 Service with Compassion not for consideration, Lions Club International District 324 A1

1998 Shree Ratna Award, International Women’s Day

1997 Louis Marchesi Fellow of the Round Table Foundation

1987 For the Sake of Honour Award, Rotary Club of Madras

1987 Ugadi Telugu Award, Madras Telugu Academy

1985 “Shastra Vaidhya Shastra Vibooshani” Award, Lioness District Assembly

1984 Rajyalakshmi Venkanna Chowdary Award for Public Service

1983 For the sake of Honour Award, Rotary Club of Salem

Publications

Publications in national and international journals : 95

Contributions to chapters in scientific publications : 8